

Exhibition

To think: Towards a new tradition in Mashiko

Friday, 29th November 2019 - Sunday, 8th March 2020

From SAMOS to Mashiko's workshop

SAMOS was a porcelain ware project that the Italian design master Enzo Mari (1932 -) worked on for Danse Milano in the 1970s. The method was neither that of craftwork by skilled artisans nor mass-produced industrial products, but was rather an attempt to create quality through simple skills derived from equal cooperation between the artisan and the designer. Mari, while seeing the importance of artisanal handwork such as modelers and machinists for industrial design, pointed out that artisans in the handcraft production areas frequently ended up doing the same work over and over out of second nature, and had fallen into a state where they had stopped thinking. Workshops held in such pottery production areas as Vietri sul Mare in southern Italy and Hasami in Nagasaki prefecture are part of an attempt to rectify this situation. What everyone tackles actively there through their own work is the "dignity of human beings" that Mari sees as so important.

This year at Atelier Muji Ginza we started an original Mashiko workshop in keeping with Mari's philosophy of handwork as represented by SAMOS. What's different from the typical workshop is that we haven't invited any instructors. A total of eleven expert participants including Mashiko artisans and designers assembled by Atelier Muji Ginza will create an open, non-hierarchical venue, and develop new ideas through thinking and making decisions together.

Towards a new standard in Mashiko pottery

The history of *Mashiko-yaki* is said to originate with a kiln for ceramics built by Keisaburo Otsuka at the end of Edo Period (mid-19th century), and Mashiko developed as a production area of pottery for daily use including planters and water pots. In the 20th century, Mashiko-yaki became known widely in and outside Japan through the works of Shoji Hamada, who moved to the town of Mashiko in 1924 and began his creative activity, as well as the *Mingei* Movement advocated by Soetsu Yanagi and others. What defined the characteristics of Mashiko-yaki was its designation as Traditional Crafts in 1979 by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (present Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry). Meanwhile, it is said that many of the potters who have taken root in Mashiko today are not confined to that framework and display liberal styles, and the region is also said to be welcoming that diversity. This flexible stance has become the driving force in the development of Mashiko as an open production area.

In creating prototypes, the workshop this time around was carried out under the following rules that are not limited to the definition of Mashiko-yaki while respecting the clay and glaze.

- The clay uses materials that are easy even for the beginners to handle, and 60% of the blend is Mashiko clay.
- Potter's wheels that are necessary for skilled potters are not used, and the works are molded with *tatara* or *himo* (clay is molded into sheet form or ropes for fabrication)
- As to the glaze, the 7 glazes of Mashiko, are used.

Displayed in the exhibition are the processes of generating 10 types of methods from the above rules, including failed works. Enzo Mari has repeatedly stressed the importance of conveying the flow of the processes involving trial and error, and that assessment should not be made by seeing the completed works alone.

We plan to keep holding workshops in the future and think about new standards for Mashiko by advancing its methods through collaborations with potters and designers. Our aim is to give due thought to future production areas to further bring new economic activities.

① **Molding with waste materials**



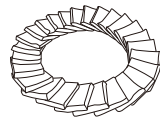
Using waste materials such as old plaster molds (casting molds are not used), they mold *tatara* using waste materials such as used bowls and tableware. → Using molds other than plaster molds frequently results in cracks due to contraction while drying. → Trouble-shooting is made with basic know-how such as placing newspaper between the mold and the clay.

② **Pick up**



Fragments of leftover clay generated during production are collected and molded. → By adding leftover glaze (ash glaze, fused lime glaze) to the leftover clay, an adhesive effect and vitrification of the glaze can be expected. Strength is still not sufficient at present.

③ **Joining**



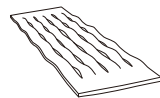
By joining geometrically cut small pieces, the desired size and form can be created freely. More complex patterns can be realized by combining multiple pieces rather than a single piece.

④ **Coiling**



Strings of clay are coiled and the pieces are molded to create the shape. → Extracted strings are used for molding to speed up the process. → Although the gap between pieces can be filled by applying a thick layer of glaze when firing, details in the spiral coiling are filled in. → Prototypes without glaze are finished and patterns for firing are made.

⑤ **Nami nami (wavy form)**



Cut pieces of thin strings of *tatara* are molded by connecting them in a series, but it takes a lot of time and work. → The completed form is simulated with a computer. → They are studying the possibility of using a surface printed in 3D as a press-mold. → They are testing a method of making a *tatara* “float” in a wavy form rather than the twisted form.

⑥ **Shifting**



Incisions in spiral forms are made into a rectangular or circular *tatara*, then the positions are shifted and pressed with a roller. Variations created by how the incisions are made are studied. → A decision is made whether to make it into the final form.

⑦ **Weaving**



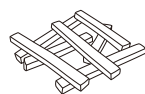
Tatara is cut into strings and then woven together. → It is difficult to weave thin strips. As one solution, they experimented with molding it into a mesh form by spreading it using a pie cutter without weaving. → They applied a method used when making handles for such items as coffee cups, and wove thick yet flat ropes by hand.

⑧ **Pressing**



Strips cut from *tatara* are overlaid in lattice or random forms and then pressed with a roller. → They can be used as fruit bowls or vessels for dried food, but further ideas are necessary to make them into vessels for cooking. → Single sheets of *tatara* are laminated onto the pressed lattice-shaped plates and then molded.

⑨ **Structuring into stick forms**



Structuring by cutting a thick slab of *tatara* into stick-shaped pieces and combining them. → Changing the content of iron contained in the glaze, they made 10 test pieces with 10 patterns of gradations. → Studying whether or not one must adhere to the 7 glazes of Mashiko.

⑩ **Cutting**



First, come up with an idea for something that can be made from a single sheet of *tatara*. It is a simple and low-cost molding method that involves cutting the *tatara* and pasting the pieces while exploring possibilities for producing more modern forms.